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AN APRICOT LUNCHEON.

By HESTER M. POOLE.

THIS is an era of individualization. Every woman has her fad; all functions are specialized. At a reception or a tea, as a distinct feature, is a solo singer, a player upon the piano, the harp or violin, or a reader from Browning. There are no more "all-round" entertainments. Even the table decorations are confined to a single flower with its relief of greenery, like a carnation, a rose of a single color, lilacs or white flowers and maiden-hair ferns. Each entertainment is a melody where rhythmic movements upon the same general theme weave sinuously as the braided waters of a transparent streamlet over their pebbly bottoms.

This modern feature of social life has its advantages. It proceeds upon the same principle that compels a workman, even an artist, to limit himself to a single avocation and make himself master of that. One set of men confine themselves to the manipulation of watch-springs, another to those tiny screws that keep the wheels and balances in place. Much is lost in a wide yet shallow acquaintance with various kinds of workmanship and much is gained in dexterity concentrated upon one certain point, and one alone.

Applied to the giving of dinners and luncheons, breakfasts and receptions the same tendencies are observed. Course dinners compel the cook to prepare and serve each *plat* in a style of perfection. Where several viands were served at once one or two failures might not be noticed. In the present custom it would be unpardonable if a single course were not up to the standard.

THE development of the specialty tends to refine the taste in all directions. Immaculate linen, hand-finished with drawn-work, hemstitching, embroidery or lace, is supplemented by a center-piece richly painted or decorated in one or another ingenious way. And this linen, over which my lady has expended a world of thought and care, very likely ruining her eyes while trying to conventionalize the similitude of roses and lilies that bloom and droop above it, only forms the groundwork for floral decorations and a show of eggshell china brought from the uttermost parts of the earth. In the execution of these—that is, both the floral ornamentation and the porcelain and cut glass—she specializes again.

For each month has its largest of floral wealth, the beauty of which can be accentuated by proper placing and environment, and also its proper fruitage, the colors of which may be made to blend or contrast with those of the flowers that bedeck it.

IN August apricots and blackberries are in prime. If the former fruit is past its first flush early peaches may take their place. In fact the same manner of treatment belongs to both fruits. The habit of specializing will cause my lady to suit her flowers and her fruits to each other, and both to the season. For her early August luncheon, therefore, she mingles the apricot, the nectarine, the peach and the blackberry, and enweathes them with the yellow nasturtium.

In the first place, be she either the denizen of the city or the happy owner of a country cot-

tage, my lady has already grown herself a bower of shade and beauty. Its base is a piazza either at the side or rear, broad and long as her hospitality. The one in mind, within twenty-five miles of New York, is thirteen feet by fifteen. Built in the rear of the sitting-room, from which it is accessible, it is near a rose-shaded corner, from which the cottage takes its name, "Rose-Corner Cottage." It is only two years old, this veranda, on which merry feet have often danced to the music of piano or guitar, but it is already covered with a riot of lush wandering vines. Here are royal grapes, rank and rich, with trailing bunches of empurpling fruit, and leaves whispering back to the wooing of the oriole that, perched upon the neighboring elm, sings his heart out upon the quivering air. Here are rose vines climbing up to my lady's window, overlooking this charming scene and eager to pour their incense at her feet. Here is the passion vine, with its starry flowers, and the clematis, all making a riotous growth, through whose cool, graceful arches are caught vista beyond vista melting into the blue hills of the Orange Mountain in the dreamy distance.

WHILE my lady craves social life and delights in dainty feasts, she neither can nor will provide hearty and heavy dinners. These luncheons, two or three a month, given to a few choice spirits "cribbed, combined and confined" in the heated metropolis, are appetizing, yet simple. Those of August are the lightest of all the year.

On low dishes, one near each angle of the table, are heaped the apricot, the nectarine or the peach, surrounded by a fotsam of big, shiny, ripe blackberries. In the center of the table is a large, low crystal dish, from which trails sprays of the yellow and orange nasturtium. These two varieties of the tall, old-fashioned flower are not novelties, but in this place are far more decorative than the dwarf nasturtium. They are so arranged that while the main stems are in the water, the tapering ends stream out toward and between the places where guests and hostess are seated. With these sprays and the luscious, highly colored and contrasted fruits, the table is almost covered.

Not with hot soup, but with cool, spicy salad, is luncheon begun. With the tender, light green heart of lettuce, on each leaf of which repose three small nasturtium leaves and one blossom, is served French dressing, and there are sliced tomatoes on a separate plate for those who desire. I said hot soup was lacking, but there was clam broth for those who like something warm to begin with. Once my lady served orange soup, more for the delicate flavor and the color than for its nutrition.

FOLLOWING it came creamed chicken, with rice croquettes garnished with sprays of nasturtium, sliced broiled tomatoes with cream sauce, and French peas with whole wheat germs. After the salad was passed salted almonds, while olives and bread sticks were in evidence. Once, after Little Neck clams, she served salmon, with cucumbers and an omelet, and once lobster Newburg took its place, with potato croquettes and cauliflower. There was no plethora of viands, while each was nicely prepared and served with noiseless daintiness.

In dessert both eye and palate were gratified. Around a dish of molded farina, ice cold, had been poured whipped cream incorporated with apricots that had been stewed and mashed through a sieve. The mold itself was em-

broided in geometrical devices by inserting in its surface the stem ends of large, ripe blackberries, while the great platter was edged with the halves of high-colored apricots and nectarines. The whole made a dish most suitable for midsummer, while it was a delight to the artistic sense. Of course there was also blackberry jelly wafers and cheese, while coffee was served both warm and iced. As nothing need be cooked the day of the luncheon, save the chicken and the croquettes, and as even the latter could be prepared the day previously and set in the refrigerator until shortly before luncheon, a single domestic, with my lady's help, suffices to cook and serve this antidote to "midsummer madness."

THE ices, where were they? My lady could hardly decide upon one variety of shape where so many suggested themselves to her fertile mind. Once there were huge individual apricots in the center of which reposed half a dozen large blackberries. Again she had peach ices and no cream.

By the way, ices and creams are by the help of the latest improvements in freezers easily concocted at home in half an hour. Made from or with the fresh fruit they are simply delectable. The whites of eggs beaten with the crushed fruit (after it is pressed through a coarse wire sieve) and sweetened to taste is put into the freezer. After twenty minutes' manipulation it is turned out upon a crystal platter, nectar and ambrosia in one. Here is incarnated not only the flavor of the fresh fruit, out an incomparable richness that to many is less objectionable in its after effects than is ice cream.

AS a change in a blackberry and apricot luncheon the fruit may be sprinkled with sugar and arranged in concentric circles, alternating with circles of the halves of apricots, nectarines or peaches. In the center and around the whole may be a ring of whipped and sweetened cream. The object is to preserve the contrast of color and of flavor so that the decorations of the lunch table shall be altogether satisfying. A blackberry and a peach shortcake is neither unwholesome nor to be despised on the score of taste. A section of each may be served at the same time, smothered in whipped cream. And no other dish is better fitted to soothe the savage breast of the city dweller, exasperated with the heat of the fiery pavements from which he has just escaped.

DECORATIVE NOTES.

IN cream linen some lovely cushions are embroidered in scrolls, with shaded olive greens, and finished with a bow in one of the corners of pale olive ribbon, lined with a cream ribbon of the same width. We have seen a cushion of yellow linen on which was embroidered, in outline, a pattern of large marshmallow flowers, and among the flowers were scattered small arrowheads solidly worked. The embroidery was in white. Needlewomen turn for subjects to lilies, golden-rod, fleur-de-lis and any other blossoms rich in color. Rose-colored linen, with Dresden pattern of tiny bouquets worked solidly, makes a charming cushion. The Agra linens are also desirable, and these linen covers wash forever. Painting on linen gives a rich field for decoration, and cushion covers of painted linen may be washed if care is taken in the process.